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Suicide in North Carolina: Deaths, Hospitalizations, and Youth Survey Results

by

Dorothee Schmid

ABSTRACT

Objectives: Suicide is among the top five leading causes of death among persons ages 5 through 44. This study presents current data on suicide in North Carolina, using data on deaths, hospitalizations, and youth survey responses.

Methods: Death records for 1997-2001 were used to describe suicide deaths by demographics, suicide mortality rates, and the methods of suicide. Hospital discharge data for 1997-2001 were used to describe the demographic characteristics of North Carolina residents hospitalized for self-inflicted injury, hospitalization rates for self-inflicted injuries, and the methods of self-injury for persons admitted to a hospital. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey for 1997 and 2001 show North Carolina middle school and high school students' attitudes and behavior related to suicide.

Results: In the five years 1997 through 2001, 4,563 North Carolina residents died by suicide. During the same time period, 19,717 North Carolina residents were hospitalized for self-inflicted injuries. The patterns for self-inflicted injuries resulting in a hospitalization and completed suicides are markedly different. The age-adjusted suicide rate for North Carolinians was 11.4, and the age-adjusted hospitalization rate for self-inflicted injuries was 48.8 per 100,000 North Carolina residents. Males had much higher suicide death rates than females, and whites had higher rates than minorities. Overall, the suicide death *rate* was highest in the 65 and older age group, though the highest *number* of suicides was among persons ages 25-44. Firearms were used in approximately two-thirds of suicide deaths in North Carolina during 1997-2001. Males were more likely to use firearms than females. Except in the 65 and older age group, female hospitalization rates for self-inflicted injury were much higher than the rates for males. More than 80 percent of hospitalizations for self-inflicted injury involved poisoning. Firearms, a much more lethal method of suicide, accounted for only 3.2 percent of hospitalizations for self-inflicted injury. In 1997-2001, for every one suicide death there were about four hospitalizations for self-inflicted injury. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 20.8 percent of middle school students reported in 2001 that they had seriously thought about killing themselves, compared to 18.1 percent of high school students. In 1997, 11.3 percent of middle school students and 8.8 percent of high school students reported that they had tried to kill themselves.

Conclusions: Suicide is a serious problem in North Carolina that requires raising the awareness of suicide, its risk factors, and possible signs; developing screening and intervention programs; fostering further research related to suicide; and creating partnerships across various agencies involved in suicide prevention and health care.



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES